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New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 128 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/60/650/Add.8 and A/60/650/Add.9)

The Acting President: I would like to invite the attention of the General Assembly to documents A/60/650/Add.8 and A/60/650/Add.9, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communications contained in document A/60/650 and addenda 1 to 7, Papua New Guinea and Seychelles have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in those documents?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 73 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster: special commemorative meeting in observance of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe

The Acting President: This morning the General Assembly, in accordance with Assembly resolution 60/14 of 14 November 2005, will hold a special commemorative meeting in observance of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Members will recall that the Assembly concluded its consideration of sub-item (c) of agenda item 73 at its 52nd plenary meeting, held on 14 November 2005. In order for the General Assembly to hold the commemorative meeting today, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of the sub-item. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of sub-item (c) of agenda item 73?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I further take it that the Assembly agrees to proceed immediately to hold the special commemorative meeting under sub-item (c) of agenda item 73?

In the absence of objection, we shall proceed accordingly.

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, it is my honour to welcome all participants to this special commemorative meeting of the General

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06-33162 (E)

Assembly to observe the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe. On 26 April 1986, the worst nuclear accident in history occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Since then, Chernobyl has become a symbol of shattering human tragedy and devastating environmental damage.

Today we have gathered here to honour the memory of the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe. It is also an occasion to remember the heroism of the emergency workers who responded in the days following the disaster, the deprivation of more than 330,000 residents of the area who were evacuated from contaminated regions and the suffering of millions of people living in affected areas, who over the past two decades have had to cope with the physical and psychological effects of the accident.

Alongside Governments, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations, the United Nations and its funds, programmes and agencies have been involved in Chernobyl relief and recovery efforts from the very beginning. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, the assistance efforts of the United Nations family were, naturally, targeted to meet the large-scale humanitarian needs. Over time the emphasis of those efforts has shifted, and the United Nations family has, since 2002, focused on promoting the social and economic development of the affected communities.

The legacy of the Chernobyl catastrophe remains strong. The effects of radioactive contamination are still being felt 20 years later in the affected region. There are ongoing international efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Here, I would like to recognize the important contributions of the Chernobyl Forum, a collective effort by eight organizations within the United Nations system and the Governments of the most affected countries — Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine — to analyse the health, environmental and socio-economic impacts of the nuclear accident.

On this solemn occasion, as we observe the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe, we should also look forward and pay attention to the continuing needs of the affected region. In the past 10 days, two major international conferences on Chernobyl, held in Minsk and in Kiev, have gathered representatives of Governments and the United Nations system and other international actors to reflect on lessons learned and to make proposals on future actions in response to the disaster. May today's event also serve to remind us of the need for international solidarity whenever and wherever international disasters occur. In today's world, the crucial challenges are borderless.

Before proceeding further, I should like to consult Member States about inviting Mr. Kemal Derviş, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, and Mrs. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, to make statements on this occasion.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Kemal Derviş, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, and Mrs. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, to make statements at this special commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, and without setting a precedent, I now give the floor to Mr. Kemal Derviş, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl.

Mr. Derviş (United Nations Development Programme): It is an honour to have this opportunity to address this body today, as we mark 20 years since the world's worst nuclear accident occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

As the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, I am pleased that the United Nations has been able to play a prominent role in the many commemorative events that have been held to mark this solemn twentieth anniversary. It is an occasion both to remember the enormous human costs of the Chernobyl disaster and to take stock of the many problems that linger two decades later. It is also time to look ahead and seek solutions that hold the promise of hope and recovery for the 5 million residents of the Chernobyl-affected areas.

Chernobyl was a devastating tragedy. Hundreds of emergency workers risked their lives in responding to the accident, and some, sadly, perished. Hundreds of thousands laboured to build a shelter around the damaged reactor. More than 330,000 people were uprooted from their towns and villages. Five thousand people who were children at the time of the accident have contracted thyroid cancer. Millions in the region were left traumatized by lingering fears about their health. We should never forget the loss and pain caused by the disaster.

The impact of the accident and the policies adopted to mitigate its consequences were compounded by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The region's mostly rural economy was devastated. Livelihoods lost 20 years ago have not yet been recovered. Farming villages have struggled to overcome the stigma of living in a contaminated region. Many communities have sunk into resignation and apathy.

In recounting the enormous human costs of the Chernobyl tragedy, however, it is important to remember that, while this is undoubtedly a tremendously sad commemoration, it is not a hopeless one. Much has been done to cope with the legacy of Chernobyl. Granted, the initial silence on the accident was reprehensible, and most Soviet citizens — as well as the international community — remained unaware for days that the accident had happened. The cover-up endangered millions of people and has left a deep legacy of mistrust among those who were denied timely, credible information.

That said, both the Soviet Government and, after 1991, the newly independent States of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine have devoted vast amounts of resources and great ingenuity to protecting the population from the effects of radiation and to mitigating the consequences of the accident. Those efforts have been largely successful.

During the past two decades, the Governments and populations of the affected regions have enjoyed the support of a broad range of United Nations initiatives. As chronicled in the Secretary-General's regular reports to the General Assembly, many agencies have been active in relief and recovery. They include the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNESCO, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, UNICEF, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank.

United Nations Member States — particularly Canada, the European Union, Japan, Switzerland and the United States — have also been generous contributors to Chernobyl recovery efforts. I would like to express my deep gratitude for their invaluable support.

However, much more remains to be done to promote the region's recovery. Renewed efforts should gain new impetus from the findings of the United Nations Chernobyl Forum. The Forum, an authoritative body composed of representatives of eight United Nations agencies and the three most affected Governments, recently concluded that most of the 5 million people who live in Chernobyl-affected areas need not live in fear of radiation. Many of the areas previously designated as contaminated are now suitable for habitation and cultivation, although precautions are still necessary in some areas. Those findings mean that many affected communities can regain the confidence they need to return to a normal life. Copies of the Chernobyl Forum report are available at the side of the General Assembly Hall.

As for UNDP, we see the greatest challenge now facing affected territories as being the need to create new jobs, to promote investment and growth, to restore a sense of community self-reliance and to improve local living standards. In short, the region needs sustainable social and economic development. There are many success stories worldwide that the region can emulate. We still strive to share these with the three most affected countries.

This is, of course, very much UNDP's mandate: to work together with the three Governments, the affected communities and other United Nations and international organizations to find the right solutions to development challenges posed by Chernobyl. Our field work in affected communities is already yielding fruit, and we count on the continued generosity of United Nations Member States to expand these efforts.

As the United Nations solemnly marks the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, we stand in solidarity with those affected by the tragedy and renew our commitment to assisting communities in

their recovery. Today, while the anniversary is filled with sadness, we also acknowledge that this is a time for hope as we move forward in building a better future for all those whose lives have been changed by this tragedy.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, and without setting a precedent, I now give the floor to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Ms. Veneman (United Nations Children's Fund): Few of us who are old enough to remember back two decades will ever forget Chernobyl. Twenty years ago this week, it became the site of the worst nuclear power plant disaster the world has ever known. But long after the media spotlight had died down, the effects lingered on, resulting in illness, psychological damage and impaired human development across large areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

For two decades the world has worked to respond to the scale and complexity of this disaster. The United Nations system has been a strong partner of the people and Governments of the regions affected by Chernobyl in their efforts to overcome their suffering and rebuild their livelihoods. Some 600,000 emergency and recovery workers have laboured to help diminish the impact of the disaster. An early response to this unprecedented emergency was lacking, but the world has learned from experience and has worked to improve its efforts over time.

While the humanitarian crisis has passed, the problems related to the health and well-being of children and young people are ongoing. As is often the case in emergencies, children suffered a disproportionate impact. A sharp increase in cases of thyroid cancer was reported after the accident, mainly in children and adolescents. It is clear that the increased incidence of childhood thyroid cancer caused by radioactive iodine fallout has been the most dramatic health impact of Chernobyl. But in a cruel irony, just as iodine deficiency in the affected area made children more vulnerable 20 years ago to the radioactive iodine fallout, even now it continues to affect thousands of children.

Iodine deficiency is the world's leading cause of mental retardation, and it is a danger to pregnant women and young children. In areas where iodine deficiency is endemic, like those affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe, it has been shown that it lowers the IQ level of children by an average of about 13 points. This can lead to poor performance in school and reduced productivity in adults.

Dealing with iodine deficiency effectively is very simple and low cost. Universal iodization of salt for human and animal consumption is the most effective way to ensure that everyone benefits from the protection of iodine. Today only about 55 per cent of households in Belarus consume iodized salt, and in Russia and Ukraine that figure is about 30 percent. This means that every year an estimated 41,000 children in Belarus, 274,000 children in Ukraine and 1 million children in the Russian Federation are born iodine-deficient.

What is needed is a commitment to action from the leaders of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The international community stands ready to help. In the three countries an alliance is needed among the public health community, the media, the consumer federations and salt producers to make sure that every household knows the benefits of iodized salt and can find it in their local store. Universal salt iodization in those three countries would be a positive and lasting legacy for those affected by the Chernobyl tragedy. By protecting health, enhancing learning potential and increasing productivity, preventing iodine deficiency disorders can contribute to the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2002 the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF, with the support of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, commissioned a report on the human consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. The recommendations in that report have guided the United Nations system's response to the needs of the areas affected by the disaster. The United Nations is now shifting its support from direct humanitarian assistance to sustainable development for the long term.

UNICEF and our partners are also working to respond to the psychological problems stemming from Chernobyl. Indeed, one of the lasting scars of Chernobyl is fear of the future, which parents too often pass on to their children. UNICEF is working to address this by educating children about healthy lifestyles and helping to instil optimism. We are working with other United Nations agencies to prepare a practical manual on facts for life to help children and

families cope with the consequences of Chernobyl. We are collaborating with partners in non-governmental organizations, on programmes to help give young people skills they need to get jobs.

The harsh reality of Chernobyl is that 20 years later the effects linger in the ground and in the minds of people. But the world has the power to help heal those wounds, to take action that will unleash the boundless human potential of the younger generation. On this twentieth anniversary commemoration we gather to remember those affected by Chernobyl, but we must also commit ourselves to preventing further harm to those in the impacted area.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus): On behalf of the Government of Belarus and on behalf of my compatriots, I would like to thank everybody for being here. We take your presence in this Hall as an encouraging sign that there indeed remain many people in the world for whom the tragedy of 20 years ago has not become a mere footnote in the history of civilian nuclear energy. Similarly, with the greatest respect and gratitude, we recall today each of the 69 partner countries who co-sponsored the comprehensive General Assembly resolution on Chernobyl last year (resolution 60/14).

By the tragic whim of fate, Belarus — by far the smallest of the three most affected countries — took the heaviest blow from that nuclear disaster. A deadly 70 per cent of the total radioactive fallout of Chernobyl settled over the territory of Belarus. One fifth of the country's territory remains contaminated with radionucleides. The overall damage to Belarus as a result of the disaster was estimated by United Nations experts to be $235 billion. One can say that Belarus is one of the few countries in the world whose work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals is virtually overcast by a sinister radioactive shadow.

What has rightly been defined as the world's worst technological disaster of the nuclear age amounts for Belarus to nothing less than a national calamity. In terms of depths of humanitarian tragedy, in terms of gravity of human perception and reaction, in terms of rupturing the social fabric of Belarusian society, the Chernobyl tragedy is the closest thing to the lingering legacy of the last world war. The war and Chernobyl are the worst scars on the soul of Belarus. They are critical and indispensable for understanding the mindset and for synching with the heartbeat of ordinary Belarusians.

As has already been said and will be said again today, much has been accomplished in the past 20 years in dealing with the aftermath of the disaster. Much has been done by the people of Belarus themselves. The assistance of our foreign partners, both Governments and civil society, has been significant and much needed. Such tokens of compassion and friendly support will never be forgotten by Belarusians. Such noble gestures build the most durable foundation for open and trustworthy relations between peoples and States.

The new strategy for the recovery and sustainable development of the affected regions was the focus of attention at a recent landmark Chernobyl event — the International Minsk Conference, which completed its work a week ago.

To underline the specific nature of the challenges faced by the countries most affected by the Chernobyl disaster and the need to develop a comprehensive and streamlined framework for multilateral Chernobyl cooperation, the Minsk Conference suggested proclaiming the years 2006 to 2016 as the International Decade for the Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Regions Affected by the Chernobyl Disaster. We hope that that initiative will receive the support of Member States. Belarus is also counting on the strong leadership of the United Nations Development Programme in the implementation of that initiative.

There are things which Belarus needs in order to overcome the damage caused by Chernobyl. In recent years we have been paying particular attention to the long-term medical and environmental consequences of the disaster. We are grateful to the donor countries, international organizations and civil society for helping us to carry out those studies. Our greatest needs and concerns relate to diagnostics and the early detection of cancer and cardiovascular diseases, especially in children. To that end, we badly need modern medical equipment.

But there are also things which Belarus can share with the world, through its knowledge, experience and foresight. During the Minsk Conference, for instance, there was support for putting to wider and better use the acknowledged experience of the Belarusian Chernobyl and nuclear scientific community. That has

particular relevance to the long-standing issue of the enlargement of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. The composition of that Committee has remained unchanged for many years, despite the new challenges and problems which have arisen in the field of radiation protection. The Minsk International Conference suggested that the General Assembly address that issue as a matter of practical urgency. Belarus, as well as other countries affected by the Chernobyl disaster, should be duly represented in the Committee.

Self-reliance is part of the national character of Belarusians. Our tragic and turbulent history has taught our people to expect very little from the outside world. Over the years, Belarusians have got used to accepting the tragic gifts of history with patience and resilience. In Belarus there is even a poetic notion that the people of the land will always carry a national "cross of suffering".

That is why Belarus is not interested in proposing yet another international decade as a mere exercise in publicity or paperwork. Nor are we vying for an undeserved piece of the global development assistance pie. Belarus will not try to shift responsibility for the recovery and development of the affected regions onto anybody else. What we are really asking for is concerned and honest engagement. What we are hoping for is an international decade of sincere human attention and solidarity with the people who are continuing to confront the dangers of Chernobyl. We are hoping for wider understanding of the fact that the problem of Chernobyl has never been local or regional. We are hoping for the brave and responsible understanding of it as a global challenge and a global concern. I have to admit that that understanding sometimes eludes us.

The twentieth anniversary of the disaster has seen the resumption of a heated international public debate about the scale and gravity of consequences of Chernobyl and the continuing relevance of the disaster. There are conflicting assessments and disparate approaches.

In Vienna, the United Nations Chernobyl Forum concluded that there is a need to further study the medical and environmental effects of the Chernobyl disaster. This important finding highlights the need for a sophisticated and balanced approach to the problems of Chernobyl. Such an approach would never dismiss in passing any alternative wisdom or opinions, no matter how inconvenient or seditious they might seem. Chernobyl constantly reminds us of how little we know and how much we have to learn about things that we thought we had fully mastered. Whether or not we have the courage to admit it, by attempting to harness the most powerful source of energy available to humanity, we have unleashed unknown risks and dangers that are as terrible as they are unseen.

It was exactly two years today that the award-winning documentary *Chernobyl Heart* was screened in this very Hall. It dealt with the work of Chernobyl Children's Project International, an international organization that works with children and communities affected by the Chernobyl disaster. Today, I would like to cite the words of the founder of that organization, Ms. Adi Roche, who was prominently featured in that documentary and who, by virtue of her accomplishments, has great moral authority, both in her native Ireland and in Belarus. She said,

> "[People] ask, 'How many people have died? How many will die? Is this or that cancer or illness definitively caused by radiation? What is Chernobyl? How much radiation were you exposed to? Why do you all look so healthy? Show me the evidence.' These are questions with often non-specific answers or answers that do not satisfy the required neat logic.
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> "We seek absolutes in situations where there can be no absolutes, no definitive answers, for we ask the wrong questions. People expect to see something grotesque and distorted and are almost disappointed when people and things appear normal — the media are perplexed. But such expectations distract from the true effects, with no realization that any dose is an overdose.
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> "If we continue to seek only logical and rational answers we will constantly be diverted from the 'true picture — a picture of human fragility, a picture of how delicately balanced the relationship between man and nature is. ... as long as we try and place Chernobyl within our existing understanding of catastrophes, understanding it will continue to elude us. Our experiences from other disasters are clearly inadequate because we are facing a realm of the unknown not previously

experienced, requiring a new understanding, a new bravery, and a new kind of courage."

We in Belarus admire those noble individuals, organizations and Governments that have remained honest, compassionate and focused on the plight of the victims of Chernobyl over the past 20 years. We admire their courage in facing the truth about Chernobyl. We admire their steadfast and deeply humane dedication to helping those who are in need. All of those good Samaritans have been and remain an invaluable source of support and inspiration for the Belarusian people.

It would be impossible to mention all of those people at this meeting, but I would like to take this opportunity to mention and honour at least some of the outstanding personalities who forged the system of United Nations coordination and cooperation on Chernobyl, and who continue to work side by side with us. They include three former United Nations coordinators on Chernobyl: President of the General Assembly Jan Eliasson, Ambassador Kenzo Oshima, and Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland. There are also a number of guests who have been invited to this meeting and who over the years have selflessly sacrificed the fire of their souls in the name of the needy children of a distant land: Mr. Donald Cairns, founder of the Ramapo Children of Chernobyl project, and the wonderful team of Chernobyl Children's Project International, including Ms. Kathy Ryan and Ms. Sherrie Douglas.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Shcherbak (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Wednesday, 26 April 2006, marked the twentieth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which emerged as the worst technological catastrophe of the twentieth century in terms of its scope and aftermath.

The heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) gathered in the Russian city of Kazan on 26 August 2005 and launched an appeal to the peoples of the CIS countries and to the world community in connection with that tragic date. The statement adopted at their meeting (see A/60/734, annex) observes that as a result of the accident, millions of people were in shock from the calamity which they had trouble comprehending and against which they could not protect themselves. Many families lost their homes and livelihoods and were forced to change their familiar surroundings and way of life.

The scope of the disaster might have been beyond measure had it not been for the courage and selflessness of hundreds of thousands of disaster relief workers at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. Risking their lives and health, they fulfilled their duty and protected people from the harmful effects and further spread of radiation.

Despite the large-scale emergency response measures aimed at addressing and mitigating the consequences of the catastrophe taken immediately following the disaster and in subsequent years, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant continues to be a potential source of danger in the centre of Europe. Minimizing this threat in the near future and on the basis of new technologies is in everyone's interest. There is therefore a need to muster the scientific, technical and financial capacity of the entire international community.

The comprehensive radiation clean-up and economic and social rehabilitation of the affected areas are issues of great importance in addressing the consequences of this terrible disaster at the present stage.

In the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, more than 59,000 square kilometres of 14 regions of the Russian Federation were contaminated; 3 million Russian people lived in these territories. The most severely contaminated regions in Russia at present are the Bryanskaya, Tulskaya, Orlovskaya and Kaluzhskaya oblasts. More than 200,000 Russian nationals took part in the emergency relief operation in the aftermath of the disaster.

The affected regions are currently experiencing particularly difficult conditions caused by the destruction of the ecological infrastructure, the outflow of labour resources and demographic problems. The state of the environment after the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station has a negative effect on the living conditions of the population. Of particular concern is the health of both the inhabitants of the affected areas and the disaster relief workers.

A key element of the Russian Government's Chernobyl mitigation policy is consistent integration of the radiation factor into all activities in order to fully rehabilitate the affected territories. The financial cost

to our country of those efforts has exceeded $5 billion dollars over the past several years. This work is now focused on social development, the psychological rehabilitation of the population and laying a solid foundation for the economic revival of the affected territories. In that context, a number of programmes are being implemented in Russia at the federal level. Between 2002 and 2005, more than 35,000 square metres of housing, along with schools and pre-school institutions for a total of more than 2,500 children and clinics with a capacity of 930 patients per day were commissioned. More than 205 kilometres of gas and water pipelines were constructed.

The Russian recovery strategy places special emphasis on informing the population about the problems involved in overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. For that purpose, a Russia-Belarus information centre, linked with the Nuclear Safety Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has been in operation since 2004. In the framework of the programme to preserve and restore the soil fertility of arable lands by 2010, measures will be taken to put into use 20,000 hectares of agricultural land affected by the Chernobyl disaster.

To successfully overcome the effects of the catastrophe, it is important that the recovery strategy be scientifically valid. We are pleased that our own experience in this field is consistent with conclusions of the major scientific conferences. I am referring first and foremost to the findings of the United Nations Chernobyl Forum, held in September 2005 in Vienna under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Clearly, its recommendations are most useful for us, but I would like to emphasize that verifying scientific research findings and reaching agreement on them will not become less relevant in the future.

Throughout these years, international cooperation on Chernobyl, with all its implications, has remained a matter of urgency for us. We take note of the attention the international community has devoted to this matter: the development of scientific contacts, assistance to us in the health field, support for our agricultural rehabilitation efforts and the promotion of an information exchange network. Here, we have always attached great importance to the role of the United Nations as catalyst and coordinator. We view the consensus adoption of General Assembly resolution 60/14 on Chernobyl in November last year and the unprecedented number of sponsors — 69 countries — as an expression of the international community's solidarity with the efforts of the affected countries and of its readiness to continue to draw special attention to the Chernobyl issue at the international level.

I would like to stress another dimension of the international cooperation in this field, one which is of great importance from our point of view: the strengthening of the capacity to respond to technological disasters, in particular those associated with radioactive accidents. In the context of the new challenges and threats facing our civilization, such cooperation is higher on the agenda than ever before. The experience gained by the Russian Federation Ministry for Emergency Situations and the Ministry's readiness to explore international cooperation in this field is well known.

We express our appreciation to the leadership of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for having served as coordinator on Chernobyl since 2004 and for its contribution to the strengthening of international cooperation in this field aimed at achieving the noble goal of improving the lives of people in the affected territories. We are also thankful to other organizations, in particular the humanitarian organizations which have worked hand in hand with us over all these years.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Volodymyr Kholosha, Deputy Minister of Emergencies of Ukraine.

Mr. Kholosha (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of the 3 million rescue workers and victims of the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, and on behalf of and on the instructions of my Government, I welcome the convening of today's meeting and wish it a successful outcome. The delegation of Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

I wish at the outset to convey my warm gratitude to the United Nations, the United Nations system and the donor community for their efforts to assist Ukraine in the difficult task of overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. I assure them all that those efforts were needed by the Government and the people of Ukraine. We hope they will continue, especially with respect to the strengthening of specific, targeted measures. We have high praise for the support offered by those countries that sponsored Assembly resolution

60/14, on Chernobyl. The appeal set out in that resolution was constructive and was aimed at ensuring continued support to Ukraine and other affected countries as they strive to mitigate and minimize the consequences of the catastrophe.

Since independence, Ukraine has faced difficulties — and not only because of the social and environmental consequences of the catastrophe. These have been years of reflection on how to address a number of urgent large-scale problems with a view to protecting the affected population and to cleaning up the environment.

What does Chernobyl mean to Ukraine? It means 3 million people affected by the catastrophe, both directly and through its consequences. It means 10 per cent of our land directly affected by radiation. It means 164,000 people from 170 towns forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere.

To resolve the problems of Chernobyl, we had to appeal for colossal material and financial resources, particularly to protect the people affected. In some years, the expenditure represented 12 per cent of our State budget, exceeding the budgets for science, culture and health care. During our years of independence alone, the expenditures from the State budget to overcome the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe have mounted to $7.5 billion.

The focus of attention of our young State has been and continues to be the individuals who suffered in the disaster, their interests and needs, protecting them from the deadly effects of radiation, improving medical services and ensuring environmentally safe food products.

Ukraine's State budget has been severely burdened by the cost of measures to bring the Chernobyl power plant off line and to make the shelter ecologically safe. Despite all that, Ukraine continues to be faithful to its international obligations, guided by the highest interests of its own people and of the international community. We understand that Chernobyl threatens the entire world. Sacrificing some of our national interests to ensure global security, we resolutely shut down the nuclear power plant. That was the second unprecedented act of free will carried out by the independent Ukrainian State. The first was its renunciation of the world's third largest nuclear arsenal.

As a country and a people, we were the most severely affected by the Chernobyl disaster. We can therefore count on the support of the international community through international programmes, human sympathy and understanding of our problems.

As we all know, from 24 to 26 April 2006 an international conference, entitled "Twenty years after the Chernobyl accident: Future outlook", was held in Kiev. The Kiev conference was the last of several conferences, forums and symposiums dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe. It demonstrated that there is no consensus among the experts on Chernobyl, particularly with regard to its health effects, and that scientific research on the true scale of the catastrophe's impact on the health of people and the environment must therefore be pursued.

Experience teaches us that the nature and effects of man-made disasters require us to use all channels of international cooperation to ensure that nowhere, never and under no circumstances should the hand of evil be raised against our beautiful planet. For the sake of life on Earth, we must overcome such catastrophes and do our utmost to ensure that they never recur. We sincerely hope that this special meeting of the General Assembly will help us to develop a common position on the current situation and our future work together, and that it will enhance mutual understanding between Ukraine, Belarus, the Russian Federation and the United Nations in the future.

I close my statement with words from the message from the President of Ukraine, Mr. Victor Yushchenko, to the international community on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident:

> "At the end of the last century, we shut down the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, but that tragic chapter in our history remains open. The globalization of environmental problems requires us to consider what kind of Earth we wish to leave to future generations. Chernobyl was not just a lesson in itself; it was first and foremost a responsibility. On Chernobyl Day, as all Ukrainians light memorial candles, we call on all sympathetic hearts to unite in their efforts for the sake of peace for our children and grandchildren and for the safety of the future of mankind."

The Acting President: I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silent prayer or

meditation for the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group during this special commemorative meeting to observe the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, under agenda item 73 (c). This commemoration is significant, for it reminds the international community to continue its generosity to the affected population.

Two days ago marked 20 years since the accident happened. The most affected countries — Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine — along with donor countries, have since undertaken to mitigate the consequences of the disaster.

The African Group supports the efforts being undertaken and expresses solidarity with the affected population. We encourage continued financial, technical and scientific assistance to minimize the consequences of the accident, as well as continued international and national cooperation and coordination of efforts to handle the development, environmental, social, economic and health aspects in that regard.

That includes coordination of the United Nations system's response to the residual problems associated with Chernobyl as part of the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as community development, building infrastructure, providing health care and healthy lifestyles, radiation mitigation and standard-setting, reactor safety, and timely and dependable scientific research on the impact of radiation.

The African continent joins in solidarity with the affected countries as part and parcel of the international community. We applaud the affected countries, donors and the United Nations system for the measures they are taking to assist the affected population and give them hope for the future.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): It is a great honour and privilege for me, in my capacity as Chairman of the Asian Group for the month of April, to address this special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly. On behalf of the Asian States Members of the United Nations, allow me to express our sincere condolences and support to the Government and people of countries that have suffered from the Chernobyl disaster.

Almost 20 years ago in Ukraine, at the fourth plant of the Chernobyl nuclear power station, there was a technological catastrophe, enormous both in its scale and in its consequences. More than 10 per cent of the country's territory was exposed to radioactive contamination. Some 160,000 people, from 170 towns, had to leave their homes forever and move to other areas. More than 3 million people in Ukraine suffered from the catastrophe and its consequences, particularly in rural areas.

Today, the special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly marks the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, which caused great suffering and serious damage in the affected areas of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation. More than a symbolic occasion, the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe will be an important opportunity to assess the international community's efforts to meet the continued needs of those most affected by the accident. This solemn event reminds us of a shattering tragedy leaving deep human scars and far-reaching socio-economic, health and environmental damage. Furthermore, it reminds us of the importance of not letting technology run out of control. Society must be the master of technology. Lastly, it serves to remind us of the need for international solidarity when international disasters afflict us, wherever they occur.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Kirn (Slovenia): It is my honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States on the occasion of the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the world's worst nuclear accident, the Chernobyl catastrophe. That tragedy occurred in our region and effected many people of our region, who still suffer its consequences.

Every year for the last 20 years, we have commemorated the tragic event at Chernobyl, the

symbol of a catastrophe for millions of people in Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation. On 26 April 1986, unit 4 of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded, releasing vast a amount of nuclear radiation into the atmosphere. The disaster unexpectedly reached global proportions. The pollution also affected other countries in Europe. Thousands of people in the worst contaminated areas were traumatized by the disaster and were displaced from their homes, and were left to face acute economic difficulties and chronic health problems. Today, we pay tribute to the memory of all the victims, those who lost their lives immediately during the explosion and those who subsequently suffered from the diseases caused by the pollution.

Allow me to take this opportunity to pay tribute also to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, other specialized agencies and programmes, individual countries and civil society organizations for their response and assistance in overcoming the consequences of this disaster. To that end, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/190, which called for international cooperation to address and mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster, thereby paving the way for coordinated and strengthened international cooperation in rendering assistance in cases of environmental emergency. In that regard, I would also like to welcome the establishment of the new Central Emergency Response Fund, which constitutes a significant step forward in improving the emergency response capacity of the United Nations in cases of disaster and conflict.

Regrettably, 20 years later, the impact of the Chernobyl catastrophe in the affected areas is still present, and much remains to be done. Several million people still live in the affected areas on radiation-contaminated soil. The scope and complexity of the humanitarian, environmental, medical, psychological and economic consequences created a problem of common concern. The saddest consequence of the disaster is that many adolescents and children, including some not yet born at the moment when the reactor exploded, have suffered serious medical, physical and psychological injuries. Those children will never be able to experience the joy of childhood they are entitled to by nature.

By the same token, the international community must take all the necessary measures, moral and financial, to further assist the victims of zones contaminated by radiation to overcome the difficulties they face in their everyday lives and to further develop programmes to forge ahead on the path to recovery.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that many hard lessons have been learned from the Chernobyl catastrophe. Enhanced public awareness of the consequences for health and the environment continues to play a crucial role. This devastating tragedy should never be forgotten. We should do everything possible, collectively and individually, to prevent its reoccurrence anywhere in the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Muñoz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the States members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, I would like to thank the Missions of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as well the President of the General Assembly and the Secretariat, for convening this commemorative meeting, which enables us to revisit not only a unique tragedy but also the plethora of cooperative responses and the reaffirmation of multilateralism it generated.

The first tribute is for the victims, for the public servants who rushed to their aid and for the intergovernmental and civil society humanitarian organizations which, in tragic circumstances, demonstrated that the best response to both the ills and hopes of human kind is to demonstrate cooperation, to extend a hand in solidarity and aid and to act humanely irrespective of any other circumstances. Human beings are in fact inextricably united by a common nature, a shared destiny and our joint defence of human dignity.

The Chernobyl tragedy shook national security and international complacency. It showed that there is no zero risk in nuclear activity or in other scientific areas and reminded us once again that mutual trust is the bedrock of international security. It demonstrated that when global security comes under threat, national interests must be harmonized with collective interests. As a result, two key conventions on multilateral nuclear security could promptly and willingly be negotiated in the International Atomic Energy Agency: the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident, and the Convention on Assistance in the

Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency.

This response confirmed the potential of multilateralism. However, one must ask why it took a tragedy of such proportions to develop fully rational and predictable mechanisms for preventive international cooperation. The lessons of Chernobyl do not apply only the sphere of nuclear security. The most important of all the lessons learned should be the capacity to anticipate all situations or phenomena that might arise during humanitarian catastrophes, from pandemics to natural disasters.

The main protagonists in the Chernobyl tragedy and its recovery were, and are, the affected people. They suffered, and they are the driving force behind reconstruction. A photo exhibit of their heroism and sacrifice is on display in these halls. We thank the organizers for this testimony to memory and hope.

The international community has also played and continues to play an extremely important role in assisting the Chernobyl victims in their recovery and in the reconstruction of devastated communities. We hear time and time again, and we do believe, that the humanitarian assistance dimension represents the best component of the United Nations system. We owe much to the specialized agencies, programmes, funds and other United Nations bodies. We are also greatly indebted to dozens of Member States and to the hundreds of non-governmental organizations and members of civil society that have contributed to this common task.

What is important, twenty years after this tragedy, is to establish in our conscience that humankind's progress should not be marked by such painful circumstances. This disaster requires a multilateral response, for which the reform of the United Nations is indispensable. More than speeches, what we need is the political will to consolidate the effectiveness of our collective response in the face of global threats.

The best tribute we could pay to the victims of Chernobyl during the Assembly's sixtieth session is to adopt an in-depth, serious approach, one uncontaminated by mistrust or small-minded calculations, to proposals to strengthen the humanitarian capacity of the United Nations. Our regional group is committed to this goal.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of France, to speak on behalf of the Western European and other States.

Mr. Duclos (France) (*spoke in French*): It is my honour to take the floor on behalf of the group of Western European and other States.

Twenty years have gone by since the Chernobyl tragedy, and it remains particularly present in our memories, both individual and collective. Today our thoughts go first to those men and women who continue to suffer from the radiological consequences of the catastrophe, mainly in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. We continue to be concerned by the health problems affecting the lives of so many men, women and children. We are also aware of the environmental, economic and social consequences of the catastrophe.

It is not possible to erase a tragedy of such enormous proportions, nor even to compensate for it. However, it is important to note that solidarity with the victims and assistance from the international community have been on a major scale. Many States took part in an effort whose scale was unprecedented, particularly to mitigate the environmental pollution and to assess the health effects, both in order to treat them and to implement social and development programmes for nuclear safety.

The debates on the real impact of the disaster should prompt us to consolidate our efforts for the health of the people, for rehabilitation and for nuclear safety at the site. Ultimately, our objective is to allow for sustainable development of the area around Chernobyl.

In terms of nuclear safety, we attach special importance to respect by all for their international commitments. In particular, we call for respect for the commitments taken in the framework of the Group of Eight to complete conversion projects and projects to make the Chernobyl site safe. It is urgent to begin the work on the second shelter for the Number Four reactor at the site.

It is appropriate today to recall Chernobyl. At the same time, we must reaffirm our determination to limit the effects of the disaster and to prevent similar events of this nature.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of the United States, as the host country.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): On this solemn anniversary we pay tribute to the lives lost and communities destroyed in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident. We especially salute the heroic actions of those who responded to the accident, saving the lives of others through their sacrifice.

The aftermath of Chernobyl continues to plague the region. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced through voluntary and forced evacuations, producing massive social disruption and economic hardship that persist to this day. Lingering fear and the uncertainty associated with Chernobyl-related health effects continue to weigh heavily on the daily lives of the affected population. In an effort to help improve the lives of those so tragically affected, the United States has, since 1992, provided $235 million in humanitarian commodities to the most needy in Belarus. These commodities have included medical supplies and equipment, as well as food and clothing. Over the same period, the United States has delivered $582 million in humanitarian commodities to Ukraine. Approximately one half of this assistance has been targeted to those affected by Chernobyl, particularly children.

The United States has also worked closely with Ukraine and the international community on issues associated with nuclear safety at the Chernobyl site and more broadly. The cornerstone of these efforts is the 1995 Memorandum of Understanding between the Group of Seven and Ukraine, which provided for the closure of the then-operating Chernobyl Unit 3 reactor, while also providing assistance to help Ukraine deal with the consequences of the Chernobyl accident and related nuclear safety issues.

With the closure of the last operating Chernobyl reactor in 2000, we have collectively improved nuclear safety for the people of Ukraine and for the neighbouring countries.

The Chernobyl Shelter Implementation Plan represents another key element of the nuclear safety framework established under the 1995 Memorandum. By transforming the deteriorating sarcophagus that currently covers the destroyed reactor, this plan will provide an environmentally safe ending to another chapter of the Chernobyl tragedy. The United States remains the largest single country donor to the Chernobyl Shelter Fund. We look forward to completion of the Shelter by 2009.

We meet here today to commemorate a catastrophe. We remember those who lost their lives, their health and their possessions. We also meet to celebrate the achievements over the last 20 years by Governments, international organizations and, most of all, the people who have worked together in response to the tragedy of Chernobyl. They have shown us courage, heroism, determination, self-sacrifice and generosity — those noble traits that give us hope for the future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria, to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and the countries aligning themselves with this statement.

Twenty years have elapsed since the catastrophe occurred on 26 April 1986. Many of us still remember the days and weeks following the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. As we have heard from the previous speakers, parts of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation still suffer heavily from the after-effects. This terrible legacy continues to affect the population in the affected regions, but especially the children. The havoc wrought upon them has given rise to serious health problems, as well as environmental, economic and social problems.

While the scope and impact of the catastrophe were huge, domestic and foreign help and assistance were almost greater. The European Union has actively assisted the authorities in the region and has been a major contributor to projects in the area, covering assessment and mitigation of the environmental contamination, evaluation of health effects and their treatment, social programmes and nuclear safety. We have also invested in research. The European Commission, through the Cooperation for Rehabilitation (CORE) and the TACIS programmes, has also provided support to the affected populations and territories.

We know that the suffering and needs of the affected people call for continued help to address the long-term consequences with a view to achieving sustainable development in the contaminated areas. It is in this respect that we can make good use of our commemoration here and worldwide. Media coverage of these events and the lasting effects of the catastrophe have been considerable. This will help both

Governments and private donors to continue their solidarity with and assistance for the victims.

The European Union believes that we should not look at the Chernobyl tragedy only through the prism of international solidarity in fighting the consequences of this disaster, but also in terms of lessons learned. We have learned that preparation of response plans in emergency situations at local and national levels, and proper training of rescue and medical teams at the community level, indeed help save lives. An international system of early warning and information sharing is essential in this regard.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the outstanding work of the United Nations system, especially the United Nations Development Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): Twenty years ago, the world witnessed one of the most terrible accidents in history. The Chernobyl accident was a horrendous tragedy because of the direct human cost, the large tracts of land poisoned, the scale of displacement of the population, the loss of livelihood and the trauma suffered by the people. Today, as we mark the anniversary, our hearts go out to the people of these blighted lands who, in the face of continuing danger and risks, have persevered in their efforts to rebuild communities and fight their way back to normalcy. We must not forget the Chernobyl disaster. We must not lose the important lessons learned from that terrible disaster with the passage of time. We must keep learning yet-unlearned lessons from the disaster in order to keep posterity from repeating the same mistakes and the same or even worse suffering.

Although much of the news coverage has disappeared from the international media and the public's interest may have waned, the truth remains that many of the affected people, their families and their communities continue to suffer in various ways. At the Chernobyl Forum, health and environmental experts under the able leadership of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization have found that the rate of thyroid cancer among the affected populations is not as high as feared. This is an encouraging finding, and we commend the participating experts for their work.

Nevertheless, health hazards are now more insidious. In addition, knowledge among the victims about the perils that they and their offspring may face is woefully inadequate. There are concerns about the environmental impact of the radiation. The afflicted communities continue to face difficulties arising from economic and social dislocation caused by the disaster. Thus, long-lasting or even permanent scars linger, some visible, others invisible though no less terrible.

I had an opportunity to see for myself some of the unspeakable damage and painful reality on the ground when I visited the Chernobyl region of Ukraine and Belarus four years ago in my capacity as Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl. In the places that I visited, the physical, psychological, environmental and socio-economic consequences were still painfully evident.

I know that much effort has been made by the national Governments of the affected countries and that the international community, including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF and other agencies, as well as a variety of non-governmental organizations from the region and beyond, have also provided much-needed assistance and support. But clearly there is much more that can and should be done to assist those in need and to undertake further research into radiation-related diseases and environmental and other impacts. The twentieth-anniversary commemoration of the Chernobyl disaster this year provides a unique opportunity for us to renew our individual and collective resolve to keep alive the legacy of that most terrifying man-made disaster and to keep it on the international agenda.

For its part, Japan has and will continue to contribute to the efforts of the affected countries and people to help them to recover from the Chernobyl disaster. In Ukraine, for example, the UNDP country team is implementing a project rooted in community-level efforts, with the aim of putting in place a sustainable, long-term economic recovery. Japan has offered a financial contribution to that project through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, which the Japanese Government has funded.

Another important project aimed at empowering people is the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network (ICRIN). ICRIN was launched

three years ago, and I had the pleasure of taking part in the effort to bring it into being. Its purpose is to provide the affected populations and communities and interested institutions with readily available access to scientific information and data that would assist them in reaching informed decisions on long-term recovery. Disseminating accurate information is an indispensable part of mitigating their fear and of helping them to make progress towards sustainable development. Japan stands ready to discuss how it can best support the important ICRIN project.

For several decades now, Japan has studied the impact of exposure to radiation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, accumulating extensive knowledge on the subject. The Japanese people feel deep sympathy for and solidarity with all those affected by the Chernobyl accident and are eager to share their knowledge and experience. With strong support from the public, the Government of Japan is committed to continuing its contribution to addressing the long-term effects of the Chernobyl disaster.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The General Assembly is holding this solemn meeting today to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. I would like, on behalf of the Chinese Government, to extend our profound sympathy and condolences to the Governments and the peoples of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Belarus, who have suffered from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

As a result of the Chernobyl disaster, the homes of millions of people were contaminated and hundreds of thousands of people had to be evacuated and relocated, completely disrupting their work and lives. Many of them were deeply traumatized, experiencing great anxiety and fear, and many have been afflicted with cancer or cardiovascular disease. According to the relevant World Health Organization report, it is estimated that as a consequence about 9,000 more people will die of cancer than is normally the case. Although it has been 20 years since the disaster, its economic, social and environmental effects still linger in Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Belarus.

The Chinese Government appreciates the tireless efforts of the United Nations over the years to eliminate the effects of the Chernobyl disaster in those three countries. We also note that in its assistance efforts to those three countries, the United Nations has shifted the focus of its work from emergency humanitarian relief to long-term development, with a view to helping the people of the affected areas establish a new and sustainable way of life. However, United Nations activities have long been hampered by the inadequacy of resources. We call on the international community to increase assistance to those three countries.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the Chinese Government has decided to provide 10 million yuan renminbi in the form of grants to the Government of Ukraine, as requested, for the purpose of implementing projects designed to eliminate the consequences and effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and to help the people in the affected areas to rebuild their homes and start living normal lives. The Chinese Government is ready to join the international community in its continuing efforts aimed at eliminating the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. We also hope that today's meeting will help mobilize sustained assistance by the international community to the three Governments and to the affected people.

Mr. Baum (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Twenty years have passed since we learned of the explosion that took place in reactor No. 4 at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl. That event caused fear and trepidation even in Switzerland, 2,000 kilometres away. We can only imagine the horror and shock that the explosion caused in the countries that were directly affected.

The long-term social, environmental and economic consequences of that nuclear accident are far from over and will continue to preoccupy the people of the affected countries, their Governments and the international community as a whole. Scientists are still debating the true extent of the effects of the catastrophe on the human population and on the environment. It is particularly difficult to assess the impact on public health and on future generations.

We must not forget that behind all of the studies, investigations and statistics published by experts throughout the world are individuals and their destinies. It is for those people that we are assembled here today to commemorate the Chernobyl catastrophe. I wish to reassure them that Switzerland, its

Government and its people have not forgotten their suffering.

Switzerland has for many years been supporting the efforts being made in Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation to deal with the consequences of the explosion in the reactor at the Chernobyl plant, including by helping to build the sarcophagus around it. We have also supported a variety of programmes through our regional offices. In all of those programmes and projects, which deal mainly with health and social issues, Switzerland works closely with the respective authorities and the local population, aiming to promote local mechanisms and initiatives to enable affected people to cope with everyday problems and to help them to develop a new outlook on life.

Switzerland is committed to helping keep alive the international awareness of the Chernobyl disaster and its consequences. Working with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, we set up a website — www.chernobyl.info — to serve as an international communications platform regarding the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

However, we still have a long way to go in overcoming the disastrous consequences of the catastrophe. Together with the international community, Switzerland will continue to accompany the affected regions in their march towards sustainable development, despite all setbacks, through dialogue with all stakeholders.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): Today's special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant testifies to the considerable attention accorded by the international community to that issue. In many countries across the world today, conferences, symposiums and meetings are being held to address this tragic anniversary.

The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was a technical disaster on a global scale. It must be recognized that, despite the passage of 20 years since that dreadful day, we have yet fully to assess the destructive consequences of the accident as it affects the health of current and future generations. Hundreds of thousands of people from Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine still suffer its effects.

An analysis of the causes and consequences of the accident is of particular importance in the context of the growing demand for energy resources. There are now more than 400 nuclear power plants throughout the world and their number will probably grow in the coming years. We believe that the principal lesson to be drawn from the Chernobyl tragedy should be an understanding of the need for reliable security at nuclear power plants. The free exchange of experience, the findings of scientific research, and the dissemination of nuclear safety technology should be the main elements of multilateral cooperation in that sphere. Humankind is duty-bound to learn the bitter lessons of the events of 20 years ago and to take all necessary steps to avoid the recurrence of such tragedies in the future.

We are firmly convinced that the Chernobyl issue should not be considered exclusively as a problem for those countries that were directly affected by the accident. The effects of the radiation fallout continue to have a negative impact on the environment on a broader geographical scale. In that regard, it is highly important to pursue international cooperation in addressing the problem of Chernobyl.

The international community has provided the affected countries with substantial assistance, although it remains inadequate to their real needs. There must therefore be joint, coordinated and wide-scale efforts to provide assistance for the rehabilitation of the affected populations and for mitigating the environmental, economic and social consequences of the disaster.

The resolution adopted at the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster" — and which was co-sponsored by Kazakhstan — recognizes the difficulties encountered by those countries most severely affected in mitigating the consequences of the disaster. The resolution invited

> "States, in particular donor States and all relevant agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, in particular the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as nongovernmental organizations, to continue to provide support to the ongoing efforts of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine to mitigate the

consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, including through the allocation of adequate funds to support medical, social, economic and ecological programmes related to the disaster" (*resolution 60/14, para. 3*).

The Chernobyl tragedy was deeply felt in Kazakhstan. It is not widely known in the international community that many people from the former republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics — including those of Kazakhstan — took part in the rescue operation. Many did not live to see today, and we bow our heads in commemoration of and respect for those who first came forward to protect the peoples not only of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, but of all Europe. In Kazakhstan, we, too, are holding a number of events to commemorate the tragedy. In Almaty, an exhibition was opened a few days ago on the twentieth anniversary of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. In the Kazakh city of Pavlodar, we will build a memorial to those who participated in the rescue operations.

In the 20 years since that tragic day, the Chernobyl catastrophe remains a serious problem for the entire international community. In those 20 years, we have been unable fully to address the ills that continue to cause many social, economic and environmental problems in the region. We are convinced that only by combining our efforts and capacities can we eliminate the terrible consequences of the accident and provide a better future for the millions who have suffered its effects.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Suárez Salvia (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Chile on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Over the years, Argentina has been a traditional sponsor of the successive resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. In particular, we have supported the convening of today's solemn event.

Commemorating Chernobyl inevitably leads us to recall the lives that were lost, the areas devastated and the errors made, as well as the need to ensure the strict application of the most advanced and complex technologies. Two decades ago, that technological disaster of unprecedented proportions tested the will and capacity to survive of the affected communities. At the same time, it tested the will and capacity of the international community to help those communities.

It is from that perspective that, at this commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, we can say that, alongside the indelible images of devastation, a profound message of faith, labour, solidarity and cooperation has also arisen. First, we must stress the ongoing and immense efforts of the peoples and Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine to cope with the consequences of the disaster by adopting measures for mitigation, recovery and monitoring in various areas, in particular health care, nutrition, infrastructure, the environment and radiological security.

To speak of the Chernobyl disaster is also to speak of international solidarity and cooperation, including the cooperation activities undertaken under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the tasks undertaken on the ground by the United Nations funds and programmes to support the efforts deployed by the affected countries; the activities of regional organizations and individual countries; and the efforts made by the donor community as a whole. It also means recalling the role played by the General Assembly in the follow-up and coordination of the efforts being made in the area of humanitarian assistance and recovery. Overall, it means recalling the multilateral undertaking channelled through the United Nations in the humanitarian field, especially with regard to the transition from relief to development in affected communities.

For those reasons, our commemoration of the victims is today accompanied by an expression of our hope for recovery.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Malmierca Diaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Chile on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Twenty years ago, a serious accident occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. Its consequences for the most affected nations are well known. Let us

now commemorate the victims of the disaster and those who, long after it occurred, continue to suffer from the consequences of contamination following the release of radioactive material.

Cuba is well aware of the enormous value inherent in true human solidarity. For decades, the Cuban people have benefited from the generous assistance of the Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian nations. To mention just one example, thousands of our young people had an opportunity to receive professional training at the universities and academic centres of those countries, as well as to gain important knowledge in all fields of learning. Extending all possible cooperation in the work to recover from the accident was therefore simply inevitable.

On 29 March 1990, we initiated the Tarara humanitarian programme, which was designed to benefit patients affected by the disaster. Its name is derived from the beach where the assistance centre is based, some 20 kilometres east of Havana. After 16 years of operation, more than 18,000 children — accompanied by some 3,400 adults — have been treated in Cuban facilities. Although the project has focused on treating Ukrainian children, patients from Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Moldova and Brazil have also treated. Those children, who arrive on our island with many different illnesses — from post-traumatic stress to cancer — are evaluated and receive treatment of every sort, including bone marrow transplants for those suffering from leukaemia. Neither the Cuban State nor its people demand a single cent for the costs incurred. The right of the Chernobyl children to live has no price.

In addition to its humanitarian component, which undoubtedly is its main aspect, the programme has also had an important scientific impact. Primary data has been collected regarding internal contamination in infants from areas affected by the accident. That information has been disseminated in the most relevant scientific forums in order to evaluate the effects of contamination. The information has been used by such international bodies of the United Nations system as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation.

Moreover, in 1998 a rehabilitation facility was opened in the city of Eupatoria, Crimea, for people affected by the accident. Since then, a team of seven Cuban doctors have provided services at the centre. More than 10,000 people have benefited from the work of that facility.

It is no secret to anyone that the effects of the Chernobyl accident will not disappear immediately. We are convinced that a true spirit of cooperation will be essential to help the victims of the accident. We must learn from the mistakes that have been made, allow new scientific and technological breakthroughs to reach everyone in the world, and put an end to inequality. In that regard, it will be very useful to strengthen cooperation among United Nations entities, including the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme.

As for Cuba, we reaffirm our commitment to continue our work in the Tarara humanitarian programme for as long as necessary. That is our modest contribution to rebuild lives that were affected 20 years ago.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil): I wish to thank the President of the General Assembly, as well as the Missions of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation, for the convening of this commemorative meeting, which is a moment of sadness, remembrance and reflection.

I also wish to associate the delegation of Brazil with the statement made by Ambassador Heraldo Muñoz of Chile, Chairman of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Twenty years ago, the devastating accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant released into the atmosphere the equivalent of more than 400 times the radiation of the Hiroshima bomb. As the worst nuclear accident in human history, the Chernobyl catastrophe was undoubtedly a historic watershed whose widespread consequences must not be underestimated.

On this solemn occasion, we pay tribute to all those who suffered and perished during and after that terrible event, as well as to their families and loved ones, whose lives were interrupted or seriously affected. We can honour their memory and suffering by ensuring that accidents like that one do not happen again.

At the time of the Chernobyl accident, no one had an immediate, clear perception of its full scope and complications. The exact number of victims remains hard to ascertain even today. The costs of the dreadful incident were overwhelming in human lives, and also severely damaged the economies of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation — the countries that suffered the most. The response of the international community immediately afterward sent a clear signal of the spirit of cooperation that prevailed after that dreadful event. Humanitarian assistance came not only from neighbouring States but also even from rivals. As a consequence, two conventions on nuclear security were concluded at the International Atomic Energy Agency, namely, those that were mentioned this morning by the Chairman of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. States cannot act alone to address events of such a large scale. International convergence if required if action is to be effective.

Chernobyl remains a necessary reference in the discussions on the future of the use of atomic energy. It is living proof of the risks involved, but also a symbol of how the nuclear industry may be capable of learning from its operational mistakes. For its part, Brazil also learned a lesson from an accident in the city of Goiania in 1987, where seven people died after being contaminated by radiological medical equipment. Such accidents also point to the need to continue to build and enhance adequate capacities to deal with major natural or man-made disasters, as well as the importance of strengthening coordination among States, the United Nations system and other international organizations while providing humanitarian assistance guided by the principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity enshrined in resolution 46/182.

I wish to add that throughout the years Brazil has provided specialized medical assistance to victims, in particular to children, who were received in our country with available cooperation of the large community of Ukrainian origin living in Brazil and also in cooperation with Cuba.

The twentieth anniversary of Chernobyl should be taken as an alert. The accident gave us a glimpse of the terrible consequences of any possible use of nuclear weapons or any major incident involving nuclear installations can cause. Unfortunately, when it comes to nuclear weapons, the threat remains unchanged and may even increase in the future. Achieving nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation thus remains a clear imperative while ensuring access to all humanity to the benefits that nuclear energy provides.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3208 (XXIX) of 11 October 1974, I now call on the observer for the European Community.

Mr. Carro Castrillo (European Community): Twenty years ago, the Chernobyl accident was one of the largest industrial disasters in human history. The accident brought devastation and suffering to Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, as well as having effects well beyond those borders. On an occasion like today, our first thoughts must be for the victims, their families and the communities affected by the disaster. I would also like to pay tribute to the lives lost and to the bravery of the firefighters and rescue workers who, at great personal cost, fought to contain the accident. They deserve our gratitude and respect.

The scale of the accident created a wave of solidarity to help Ukraine and the other affected countries. The European Commission and the European Union member States have been at the forefront of the assistance to deal with the effects of the accident.

Since 1986, the European Commission has allocated over €470 million — around $600 million — to Chernobyl-related projects. This assistance has supported safety improvements at Chernobyl and has provided help to people whose lives are still affected by the disaster. The largest proportion of the Commission's efforts — around $300 million — have been dedicated to the Chernobyl site itself, through inter alia the Chernobyl Shelter Fund. The Commission has also supported projects to help the local populations with programmes addressing the social, health and environmental consequences of the accident. Over and above the aid provided specifically to cope with the aftermath of Chernobyl, the Commission has also made a major contribution of some €1.2 billion over the last 15 years to the improvement of nuclear safety across the countries of the former Soviet Union.

The European Commission will continue supporting projects for the improvement of nuclear safety as well as projects dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. These include assistance for the sustainable social and economic

development of the affected regions. We will also continue working together to ensure that such a catastrophe never happens again and that the lasting legacy of Chernobyl will be a safer environment for the region and for us all.

To conclude, I would like to join those who have commended the assistance given by the United Nations system, in particular by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Forde (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), let me, first of all, thank the Assembly for this invitation to participate in this most important commemorative meeting. Owing to time constraints, I shall highlight some of the important aspects of the long version of my speech which is to be circulated to the Assembly.

Twenty years have passed since the Chernobyl disaster and its terrible consequences. The IFRC's key message here today is that those affected will need our continued support for many years to come. We will not in any way decrease our efforts to work with them and to meet their needs. The IFRC, with our worldwide membership, accepts this responsibility and will continue to work with other partners elsewhere.

All of us here are very familiar with the major impact of the Chernobyl disaster's radiation exposure on the health and well-being of people living in the most affected areas. We are all particularly aware of the high increase in thyroid cancer among the population living in those regions. This health phenomenon is all the more serious, in view of the fact that it primarily affects children and adolescents, especially those who were born at the time of the disaster or were under the age of 18 years. We should not forget that this type of tumour is normally very rare in children and adolescents. However, in some areas of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, the incidence is on average 16 times higher than in countries not affected by a nuclear accident.

As auxiliaries to government, Red Cross societies in the affected countries support populations in remote areas by screening for thyroid cancer, providing multivitamins to children and providing psychological support for the populations.

We at the IFRC continue to seek financial assistance and partnerships with other organizations. We are particularly grateful to the Governments of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine for their guidance. We offer our thanks to our donors, especially to the Government of Ireland, for enabling us to reach all those in need.

Our experience with the United Nations family is very positive. The ongoing coordination work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is of the highest importance. That is why agencies working to help people suffering from disaster need to continue to be fully integrated into the coordination framework of UNDP. Initiatives such as the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network, the Chernobyl information website and the Cooperation for Rehabilitation programme must be commended. The IFRC emphasizes the particular significance of this commemoration and, apart from this event, our President has spoken at the international conference held in Kiev and our Secretary-General has similarly spoken in Minsk.

In conclusion, I again wish to highlight the need for continual international support for people affected by the Chernobyl disaster. We and our member national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies accept the responsibility to continue that support as well as to play our part.

We welcome the reassuring words of intent that we have heard from others today. The task ahead will be to translate those assurances into tangible results for vulnerable people.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

I would like to make a few closing remarks. On this solemn occasion, we have heard telling testimony about the suffering caused by the Chernobyl nuclear accident of 1986, and we have paid tribute to all of the victims of the disaster.

We have also been encouraged to learn the hard lessons of Chernobyl. Those lessons apply not only to

the importance of the safe use of nuclear power, but also to the vital necessity of providing the public with credible and transparent information in the event of any crisis and of ensuring broad public participation in decisions involving any potentially hazardous technology.

We have heard evidence of the ingenuity and creativity of efforts to overcome the impact of Chernobyl, including measures designed to protect the population from radiation exposure and to devise safe means of conducting agricultural activities in contaminated regions. We have also learned about the costly and painstaking efforts by Governments and the international community to mitigate the health consequences of the accident.

We have been heartened by accounts about the potential for the recovery of the region. The shift, effected by the United Nations in 2002, from a humanitarian response to the Chernobyl catastrophe to one that emphasizes social and economic development has been seen as offering real hope for the revival of communities blighted in the aftermath of the accident.

It is incumbent on all of us to turn this hope into reality and to provide unabated international support for the efforts of the Governments of the most affected countries — Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine — to help them to overcome the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (c) of agenda item 73?

It was so decided.

Announcement by the Acting President

The Acting President: Following the adjournment of this meeting, an exhibition of photographs relating to the Chernobyl catastrophe will be opened in the visitors' lobby. All members are invited to attend.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.